

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9783

S E C R E T CAIRO 8491

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS

SUBJ: CLEARANCE OF SUEZ CANAL

REF: CAIRO 8332; STATE 235237

1. DURING CALL BY SCA CHAIRMAN MASHOUR, HE BROACHED SCA' S CONTINUING NEED FOR MINE/ORDNANCE CLEARANCE ASSISTANCE EVEN AFTER CTF-65'S PRIMARY MISSION IS COMPLETED IN EARLY DECEMBER. HE POINTED OUT THAT THIRD SWEEP CHECK IS NOW UNDERWAY AND IS STILL LOCATING UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE. MOREOVER, TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF REOPENING SUEZ CANAL ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE CANAL ITSELF, BUT ALSO INVOLVE CLEARING BANKS OF MINES AND ORDNANCE. HE RECALLED CONVOYS TRANSITTING THE CANAL OR INDIVIDUAL SHIPS REGULARLY HAVE TO TIE UP TO ONE OF THE BANKS BECAUSE OF WEATHER CONDITIONS OR ENGINE PROBLEMS INEVITABLY, ON SUCH OCCASIONS, THE VESSELS PRESS AGAINST THE BANKS. IF MINES OR UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE ARE STILL EMBEDDED IN THE BANK AREAS, SUCH PRESSURE WILL CERTAINLY EXPLODE THEM AND CREATE CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE. WITHOUT FULL ASSURANCE CLEARANCE COMPLETED, INSURANCE RATES WILL BE SUCH AS TO MAKE USE OF CANAL NON-COMPETITIVE. SUEZ CANAL, HE ASSERTED, WILL NOT BE SAFE FOR SHIP PASSAGE UNTIL BOTH ITS WATERS AND THE BANKS ALONGSIDE ARE CLEARED OF MINES AND ORDNANCE. HE HOPED THEREFORE THAT USG ASSISTANCE WILL CONTINUE.

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2. I TOLD MASHOUR THAT CTF-65 PRIMARY MISSION WILL BE

COMPLETED BY EARLY DECEMBER. WE HAVE FROM OUTSET CAUTIONED OUR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS THAT NO 100 PERCENT GUARANTEE COULD BE GIVEN THAT ALL OF THE MINES AND ORDNANCE ARE CLEARED, BUT ADMIRAL CARROLL HAS ASSURED ME THAT HE BELIEVES BY EARLY DECEMBER SUEZ CANAL SHOULD BE NAVIGABLE FOR SMALLER VESSELS. ADMITTEDLY DREDGING POSES A PROBLEM, BUT THIS IS A GAMBLE THAT IS UNAVOIDABLE. DEPLOYMENT OF CTF-65 IN REGION IS A COSTLY PROPOSITION. WHILE WE ARE WILLING TO ASSIST GOE SO LONG AS FORCE IS ABLE TO MAKE CONTRIBUTION COMMENSURATE WITH ITS COST, ADMIRAL CARROLL HAD TOLD ME THAT AFTER DECEMBER, OPERATION WILL BE ONE OF DIMINISHING RETURNS. SO FAR AS ORDNANCE CLEARANCE IS CONCERNED, I ALSO REMINDED HIM THAT OUR MISSION HAD BEEN CONFINED TO TRAINING EGYPTIAN ENGINEERS FOR SUCH WORK AND TO PROVISION OF CERTAIN SPECIAL EQUIPMENT. WE HAD COMPLETED THAT ASPECT OF THE MISSION AND EGYPTIAN ENGINEERS (TOGETHER WITH SOME FRENCH DIVERS) HAVE BEEN DOING THE ORDNANCE CLEARANCE JOB.

3. NEVERTHELESS, ADMIRAL CARROLL AND I AWARE OF THE "BANKS" PROBLEM THAT MASHOUR HAD INDICATED. I HAD ALREADY RAISED WITH WASHINGTON POSSIBILITY OF KEEPING A SMALL RESIDUAL EOD FORCE HERE TO ASSIST OUR EGYPTIAN FRIENDS. I KNEW THE MATTER WAS UNDER STUDY, BUT COULD AS YET GIVE HIM NO RESPONSE. I PROMISED BE IN TOUCH WITH HIM AS SOON AS I HEARD SOMETHING. MASHOUR EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION.

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